

2022 Major Review of Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and Religious Affiliation Standard

FAQs

What is ASCRG?

Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) is a classification of all religious groups and subsets of religions in the world. The scope of the classification includes all religious groups; in practice, only those religious groups that have a significant number of affiliated persons in Australia are separately identified.

The Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) has a three level hierarchical structure that consists of broad groups, narrow groups, and religious groups.

The broad group level (one digit level) is the highest and most general level of the classification.

The first five broad groups are generally accepted as World Religions: Buddhism (1), Christianity (2), Hinduism (3), Islam (4), and Judaism (5). The remainder broad groups are Other Religions (6) and Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religion (7). Each Broad Group is made up of one or more Narrow Groups.

Narrow groups are represented by two or three digit codes. Narrow Groups are composed of one or more Religious Groups.

Religious Groups are the most detailed level of the classification. Some religious groups are residual categories, or 'not elsewhere classified' (nec) categories, which contain entities that are not listed separately in the classification.

An example of how the classification hierarchy fits together is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Representation of Eastern Orthodox Religious Groups in the ASCRG

Broad Group	Narrow Group	Religious Group
2 Christianity	223 Eastern Orthodox	
	2231	Albanian Orthodox
	2232	Antiochian Orthodox
	2233	Greek Orthodox
	2234	Macedonian Orthodox
	2235	Romanian Orthodox
	2236	Russian Orthodox
	2237	Serbian Orthodox
	2238	Ukrainian Orthodox
	2239	Eastern Orthodox, nec

What is the Religious Affiliation Standard (RAS)?

The Religious Affiliation Standard (RAS) outlines how questions about religious affiliation in Australia are asked. A question about religious affiliation is included in the Australian Census of Population and Housing (the Census), which is run by the ABS every 5 years. Responding to the question is optional and responses are coded using the ASCRG classification.

What is Religious Affiliation?

An affiliation is a connection to a group, not necessarily in an official capacity. For example, you can be affiliated to a club or organisation, without being an official member. Religious Affiliation is self-assessed. It is not designed to measure the level of adherence to beliefs or participation in practices common to the nominated religion.

What is a Religious Denomination?

A denomination is a recognised branch, school, or sect of any world religion.

Why does the ASCRG need to be updated?

While the current version of the ASCRG had some minor updates in 2016, it largely reflects the original 1996 version of ASCRG based on the social environment in Australia at that time. The Australian community has changed considerably over this time and the ASCRG and the RAS both need to be reviewed to reflect this. ABS has also received feedback from individuals and organisations identifying areas that need review. Data from the 2021 Census will further inform the review.

How is the scope of the review determined?

The ABS is embarking on a major review of ASCRG and the RAS. In a major review, all known issues and concerns are considered for possible change. The updated ASCRG is currently scheduled for release in December 2023. Any changes to the RAS are dependent on Census 2026 question testing and will be published prior to the 2026 Census.

The ABS has identified some initial areas that are in-scope of this review, outlined below and based on:

- Feedback already received from individuals and organisations.
- Research into how people have responded to the Religious Affiliation question in previous Censuses.
- Issues identified through standard classification maintenance processes, including consideration of the classification criteria.
- Comparison with other religion classifications and standards used by demographically similar countries (e.g. StatsCan and StatsNZ).

The ABS is seeking your feedback to help identify any other areas that should be considered in this review. For more information on the scope of the review, see the document *2022 ASCRG and RAS Review Scope*, available on the **Consultation Hub** in the **Related** section of the **Overview** page.

What is the impact on official statistics?

When there are changes to a classification, data produced using that classification may not be directly comparable over time. The ABS provides concordance files and supporting documentation to make sure you can

understand how changes to the classification will impact data produced from one time point to another.

The final round of public consultation, in the second half of 2023, will outline the proposed changes to the ASCRG and RAS. This consultation process will provide an opportunity for individuals and organisations to provide feedback on the proposed changes before they are implemented.

How do I provide feedback?

You can provide feedback by making a submission via the [ABS Consultation Hub](#).

Any questions?

Please email standards@abs.gov.au with any questions on this consultation or for further information.

How will the information in my submission be used?

The information you provide in your submission will be used to inform the review and preparation for the 2026 Census. More information about how ABS manages privacy can be found here [Privacy at the ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

What happens after the Consultation hub closes?

After the Consultation hub closes, all submissions will be reviewed. The ABS may reach out to submission authors for more information if they have agreed to be contacted. The ABS will also seek feedback on the proposed changes to the ASCRG and the Religious affiliation standard in the second half of 2023.

Any updates to the RAS will be released after the Census content consultation has occurred and the question has been tested. This will occur prior to the 2026 Census.

In addition, a general review of Census content will occur in parallel to this review; and will also include public consultation. The review of ASCRG and RAS will provide input into the broader review of Census.